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COLLEGE BINGE-DRINKING PREVENTION PROGRAM CALLS ON PRINCETON REVIEW TO STOP PUBLISHING “PARTY SCHOOLS” LIST

Unscientific Rankings Send Wrong Message to Young People about Drinking

Chicago – The American Medical Association’s A Matter of Degree program called on the Princeton Review today to remove the “Top Party Schools” ranking from its annual *Best Colleges* guide because it is misleading and gives college-bound students a skewed perception about “partying” on campus.

Every year in late August, college administrators around the country worry about the release of the guide and where their school will be on the Review’s notorious list and its accompanying rankings in such categories as “Lots of Beer” and “Hard Liquor.”

“The Princeton Review should be ashamed to publish something for students and parents that fuels the false notion that alcohol is central to the college experience and that ignores the dangerous consequences of high-risk drinking,” says Richard Yoast, Ph. D., director of A Matter of Degree and the AMA’s Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse.

“College binge drinking is a major public health issue and a source of numerous problems for institutions of higher learning.”

According to the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study, approximately 44 percent of college students engage in binge drinking, placing themselves and others at risk. A study commissioned by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism’s Task Force on College Drinking found that excessive drinking accounts for a staggering 1,400 deaths, 70,000 sexual assaults and 600,000 assaults on campuses every year.

“The party schools list contributes to this problem by legitimizing high-risk drinking,” says Yoast. “Students who are looking for little more than a good time may be influenced by this ranking, and the ‘party school’ designation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Moreover, schools should not be carelessly ranked by how hard they ‘party.’”

Yoast questioned the Review’s sloppy methodology in developing the party schools list. Every three years the Review dispatches its workers to campuses across the country

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where they set up tables and poll roughly 65,000 students on 70 questions in 63 categories. Larger schools with the same number of respondents as small schools will have a far smaller sample group to represent the whole. Recent online polling also has been criticized due to evidence that some schools have sent the questionnaire to specific students for predictable responses.

Additionally, the titles for the survey categories do not accurately represent the questions students are actually asked. For instance, students are asked to rank their schools based on such questions as “lots of hard liquor,” “major frat and sorority scene” and “lack of time spent studying,” which are combined for the “party school ranking,” irrelevantly assuming that those who spend little time studying automatically party more.

Even the Review’s own staff members have expressed second thoughts about including the party ranking in the guide. In 1997, the Review’s former editor-in-chief Evan Schnittman told a publication that he debated pulling the party ranking for years “because it’s not something that represents what the book’s about.” But he stopped short of doing that from fear that eliminating the ranking would result in “zero press” (and thus, fewer sales).

Studies conducted on behalf of A Matter of Degree found that an overwhelming majority of parents (95 percent) believe excessive alcohol consumption is a serious threat to their children. And, 85 percent say that the easy availability of alcohol in college communities contributes to too much drinking.

A Matter of Degree: The National Effort to Reduce High-Risk Drinking Among College Students (AMOD) is administered by the AMA Office of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse, and funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Through AMOD, 10 of the nation’s leading universities participate in a national demonstration project to reduce binge drinking and its harmful effects on colleges and communities. AMOD uses powerful campus-community partnerships to go beyond traditional prevention efforts that focus on the individual drinker, recognizing that the social environment also influences individual decision making.

More information about A Matter of Degree is available on the Web site, <http://www.amodstrat.net>

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